Tim Budig, Political Pulse (blog)

Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton signed an executive order this morning enrolling the state early into federal medical assistance - something former Republican governor Tim Pawlenty refused to do.

Supporters view the enrollment as bringing an additional $1.2 billion to Minnesota health care providers and eventually expanding federal benefits to 95,000 Minnesotans.

Democratic Fourth Congressional District Congresswomen Betty McCollum applauded the step.

"Expanding Medicaid health benefits to our state's most vulnerable citizens means more efficient health care delivery and cost savings to Minnesota taxpayers," she said.

U.S. Senator Al Franken also praised Dayton's action.

"I fought hard for this provision in health reform and I'm very pleased that Governor Dayton has acted early and decisively to take federal Medicaid dollars to insure low income Minnesotans," said Franken.

But House Republicans in a joint health care committee meeting today repeatedly questioned whether the federal government could afford to keep its health care promises.

Rep. Mary Kiffmeyer, R-Big Lake, suggested the federal government was a piggy bank that "had been shaken so much."

"I don't have a repeal bill in the hopper," quipped House health and human services finance committee Chairman Rep. Jim Abeler, R-Anoka.

But Abeler, too, expressed concern the federal government could ultimately leave the state holding the health care bag.

But Rep. Tina Liebling, DFL-Rochester, suggested the Republican angst was misplaced, as the executive order had been signed.

"That's kind of a done thing," she said.

"It's kind of off the plate," said Liebling.